

Prague European Summit 2020 Daily Summary

November 19 (Day 2)

Climate change and the environment were the major themes in today's sessions at Prague European Summit. **Ingeborg Radok Zˇádná** and **Martin Kastler** highlighted how the pandemic should be viewed as an opportunity to adapt to an eco-friendly mindset. **Tom Steyer**, climate activist and former candidate for the US Presidency, offered an inspiring message for everyone to collaborate and make an effort to adopt new habits using renewable energy and resources.

The role of trade and industry in environmental matters was addressed in several panels. The shift in the attitude of both industries and governments to align industrial and environmental needs was discussed in the session *Green Transitioning: What Role Can Industry Play Towards an Ambitious Sustainable Industrial Strategy for 2030 and 2050?* Panelists said moving toward a circular economy will create major opportunities for new businesses and investing in greener industrialization is the key to guarantee an economic green transitional growth. How regions dependent on carbon-intensive industries should prepare for the future was also touched on in *Decarbonization and Just Transition: Rethinking the EU's Approach*.

In the talk *Natural Resources Management for Environment Positive*, Co-Chair of the UN Environmental Programme International Resource Panel **Janez Potočnik** stressed the importance of understanding who are the real drivers of the exploitation of natural resources in order to suppress the demand in consumption.

The importance of responsible consumer choices was underscored in the session *Companies and Climate Crisis: What can they really do?* where speakers noted that the credit card is the most efficient factor in the fight for a greener economy. On the company side, running a green business requires reimagining supply chains, distributions channels and the way we invest.

The power of trade to reinforce environmental policy was the subject of the panel *Using Trade Policy to Tackle Climate Change and Protect the Environment* where speakers like **Stéphane Dion**, Canada's Ambassador to Germany, emphasized that you cannot fight climate change without trade. In this session, panelists discussed how to



implement a carbon border mechanism that would be successful and pondered how inclusive US President-elect Joe Biden's environmental policy will be.

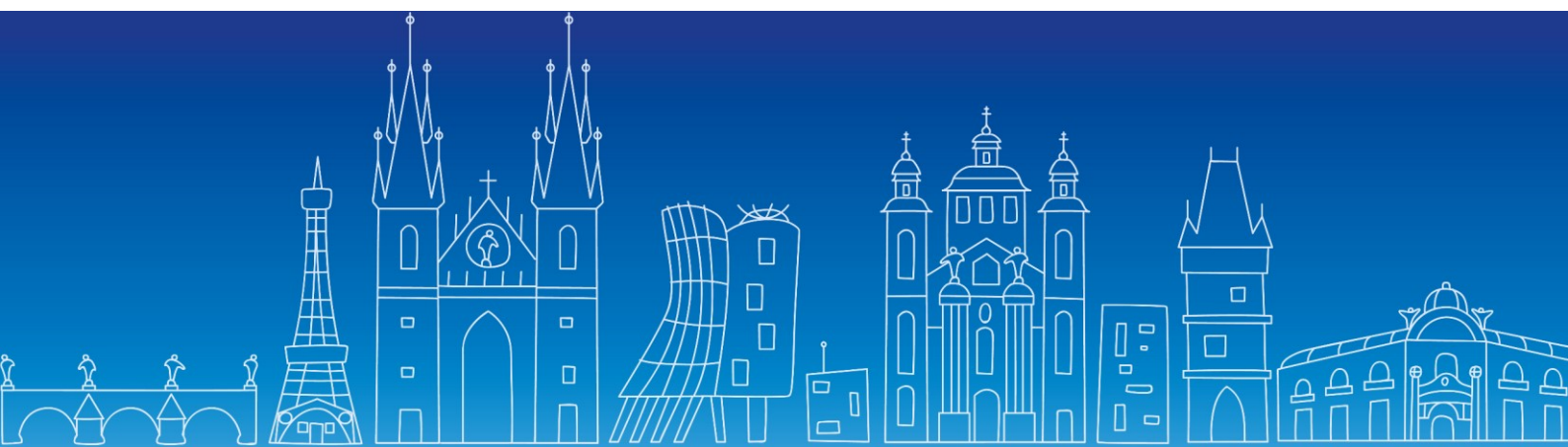
The combined efforts of local governments, the private sector, and European investment as drivers to enabling the green transition was also mentioned. The session *How Can the European Cities Help the Green Transition?* addressed the opportunity to accelerate this transition in light of peoples' change in mobility patterns and lifestyle habits brought on by the pandemic. Mayor of Prague **Zdeněk Hřib** believes green innovation efforts in cities have the potential to spread and inspire rural areas.

During the discussion *Europe as a Geopolitical Actor: A new leader in a greener, digital world* and Former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden **Margot Wallström** highlighted that what gives the EU its geopolitical strength is the unity among Member States.

Other than the environment, the COVID crisis' impact on democracy and geopolitical strength of the EU were also the subject of debate. In *Europe in Crisis: Role of the EU in Times of COVID-19*, Commissioner for Crisis Management at the European Commission **Janez Lenarčič** noted some of the Commission's key efforts to combat the pandemic, including the creation of a European reserve for medical equipment to avoid future shortages. He also expressed regret at Poland and Hungary's decision to veto the EU Recovery Fund given that it seriously hinders the EU's ability to tackle the pandemic.

The panel *Rule of Law: Should the EU Mechanism for its Safeguarding be Revised?* looked at Poland and Hungary where the pandemic, lack of trust in political actors, rise of populism and autocratic rule have contributed to the weakening of rule law. Speakers agreed that the Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights should be used as the basis for rule of law in order to try to reestablish the relationship between citizens and their government.

EU Enlargement was also addressed. The Western Balkans' domestic conditions, weak political commitment and lack of modernization to European standards are the major points stopping their accession into the EU, as discussed in the panel *COVID-19 as an Opportunity for a Fresh Approach to EU Enlargement*, in cooperation with the Embassy of Slovenia in Prague. Speakers argued that countries that are less developed than the



EU member states need to go through a transition period before becoming members themselves.

Digital literacy was highlighted as one of society's shortcomings in the session *How Can Democracy Reinvent itself in the Digital Age?* Panelists stressed that democracy's resilience can be improved by finding a balance between democratic tradition and digital innovation. From their standpoint, regulations for companies or binding treaties that allow for non-EU member participation are needed.

The rise of nationalism in the United States and Central and Eastern Europe was addressed in panel *Democracy in Decline: Can Europe lead a Renaissance of Multilateralism and Democracy?* Speakers characterized nationalism as a response by those who were left out by the democratic system. Given the internal divisions of the EU and its lack of hard power in terms of European forces, the EU remains a weak actor when it comes to multilateralism, speakers said.

Several video messages also called for the inclusion of those often left out of the political process. Aspiring future leaders of Europe **Martina Větrovcová** and **Dénes András Nagy** advocated for young people's involvement in policy changes. Former president of Latvia **Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga** stressed the importance of enhancing women participation in the political processes. Director of EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy **Vladimír Bartovic** and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for European Issues **Aleš Chmelař** closed the conference with thanking all attendees and partners.





Recordings

You can watch the recordings of the Prague European Summit (PES) and Urban Talk on our Facebook.

PES Main Hall: Morning Live Stream ([8:00 – 12:00](#))

PES Mirror Hall ([14:30 – 16:35](#))

PES Main Hall: Afternoon Live Stream ([13:00 – 18:30](#))

Companies and climate crisis – What can they really do? (in [English](#))

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